



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to ODIHR Director Strohal

As delivered by Charge d'Affaires Paul W. Jones
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 27, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Ambassador Strohal, for your report. We very warmly welcome you back to the Permanent Council.

As several of us have already noted, today, of course, is the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz Concentration Camp, which was certainly an important turning point in the history of Europe and in the history of human rights.

When we commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and the concentration camps, we should be reminded of an important fact that has become one of the guiding principles of the OSCE: namely, that states have a right and a responsibility to pay attention to developments in human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy, and rule of law in other states. If we take away no other lesson from this tragedy of the 1930's and 1940's, it should be that.

Within the OSCE we have all agreed that violations of human rights and democratic principles are not purely domestic matters. Rather, they are matters of legitimate international concern for all participating States. Moreover, since all participating States have agreed to exactly the same commitments in these areas, there are no double standards when it comes to human rights and democratic elections. Ambassador Strohal made this clear in his presentation on ODIHR's election observation methodology, and the United States firmly agrees.

The United States believes that the ODIHR is doing an excellent job of helping participating States fulfill their commitments in every area of the Human Dimension.

We thank Ambassador Strohal for explaining exactly how, through thematic programs, individual projects, human dimension conferences, and election observation activities, ODIHR assists states to improve implementation of our commitments to human rights and democratic principles. We welcome ODIHR's priorities for 2005 and encourage all participating States to cooperate with the office and to support its programs in the coming year.

The United States appreciates the work ODIHR has done to help build up its Program on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination. This program will be essential in helping the OSCE monitor and combat incidents of racism, anti-Semitism, discrimination against Muslims and other forms of intolerance.

We look forward to the 2005 launch of projects in the fields of legislation, law enforcement, education, and monitoring that will help spread the word on best practices for preventing and responding to hate crimes. We encourage participating States to consider making extra-

budgetary contributions to these projects, to signal their support for ODIHR's work, and to fully utilize the assistance that ODIHR has to offer.

The United States also hopes that the three Personal Representatives for tolerance will cooperate with ODIHR and help strengthen the Tolerance Program through their activities. In this regard, we commend Ambassador Strohal's initiative in inviting the Representatives to meet in Warsaw next week.

We look forward to several events that ODIHR will organize in 2005. We believe that the Seminar on Migration and Integration has the potential to bridge the OSCE's work in the Economic and Human Dimensions. However, we hope that the Human Dimension seminar will avoid duplicating the Economic Forum's important work. We believe it should instead address best practices for implementing the Berlin and Brussels Decisions, including non-discrimination for legal migrants in the workplace, as well as voting rights for internally displaced persons.

Mr. Chairman, this leads me to the issue of Copenhagen Plus, or the possibility of considering supplemental OSCE commitments for the conduct of democratic elections. The United States actively supports the development of additional commitments that would supplement the Copenhagen Document, which already provides a sound and objective basis for assessing elections in the OSCE region.

For example, the U.S. would welcome additional commitments to fill possible gaps in the fields of electronic voting, improving electoral participation, and increasing public confidence in elections through transparency and accountability. We would support a Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting geared towards concrete outcomes in one or more of these specific areas.

We will not, however, agree to any proposals that would call into question ODIHR's election observation methodology or its autonomy. We believe that ODIHR's current methodology is transparent and objective, and that is why it enjoys credibility among the vast majority of OSCE participating States, other international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and domestic observer groups throughout the world. That credibility rests on ODIHR's autonomy and on the ability of ODIHR election experts to do their job without political interference.

The United States commends ODIHR on an excellent job with a record number of Election Observation Missions in 2004. ODIHR deployed over 5,000 observers, and supported or was involved in 15 important and in some cases pivotal elections.

If there is a perception that ODIHR's election assessments have become less positive than they were five or ten years ago, we would submit that this is not due to any problem with ODIHR's observation methodology or with the Copenhagen commitments that participating States unanimously agreed to in 1990. Instead, if there is a problem with elections in the OSCE region, it is one of implementation or of a lack of political will to follow-up on ODIHR's recommendations.

Mr. Chairman, I hope that my remarks illustrate the strong U.S. support for ODIHR as it pursues its goals that are at the core of our organization and central to protecting human rights and democratic principles. Thank you.